

A Break-Up by flippyspoon

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Summary:

Steve doesn't know what love looks like.

A Break-Up

Author's Note:

Billy writes an overly perceptive love letter. Because I said so!

“I can’t do this anymore.”

They’d just eaten burgers at The Dairy Queen and suddenly Steve was saying these words.

Billy blinked at him and took a drag and said, “What?”

Billy didn’t even catch his meaning the first time because the words didn’t make any sense.

“I...I can’t...do this anymore,” Steve said. “Us. You and me. I can’t do it.”

Billy thought later it was like somebody hitting him over the head with a block of wood which was not unlike what seeing Steve for the first time had felt like.

“What...what are you talking about?” Billy said. It was weird how calm he sounded, he thought.

“It’s not because you’re a guy or anything like that. It’s... You don’t love me,” Steve said simply. “It’s not your fault. You never said you did and I shouldn’t...expect you to suddenly start.”

Billy couldn’t think enough to formulate something coherent to say. His emotions had a tendency to override coherent thought sometimes and now he was short of breath, his blood seeming to run cold. His hands stung, which was just fucking weird. Why would his hands sting?

Of course he’d thought a million times that he loved Steve. It took all his strength to concentrate on other shit sometimes when the very thought of Steve pulsed in his head when they were apart. He couldn’t remember now if he’d ever said it or not. But he’d *shown*

himself to Steve which he thought was the same fucking thing after all. He told Steve everything, all the shit he thought he could never even talk about he'd said to Steve while in his arms. How how how could Steve...?

Steve kept talking.

"Look, I don't know. Maybe I'm just doomed to love people when they don't love me, but I can't fucking do this again-"

"Why? Why do you think I don't?"

"You don't say it," Steve said, smiling sadly as if that was it. That was the final answer. "If you did, you'd say it. If you loved me just a little bit, or just...*enough*-"

Enough?

"Steve..." Billy took a breath and he felt his stomach plummeting at great speed to the ground as he said, "I...I do...love you." It came out garbled, as if he were being strangled. He cleared his throat and tried again. His eyes were filling with tears so he couldn't see, Steve a blur beside him. "I do love you." The words felt to light then as if carried away by the wind.

"I...don't believe you," Steve said. He even sounded like maybe he wanted to believe Billy and couldn't and none of it made sense. "It doesn't sound right."

Billy blinked and it made a tear slide down his cheek. If he'd been thinking clearly he might have realized that this was just about Steve being insecure and not knowing what this kind of love actually looked like but he couldn't think clearly at all because his greatest fear was coming true and Billy was trying to fix it and it still wasn't working.

"Steve. Wait-"

"I'm going out of town in the morning," Steve said. "Just a couple days. This thing at my dad's alma mater. It's dumb. I thought...it would be good if we, ya know, put a few days between us. To...I dunno." Billy saw Steve wipe his eyes and it made him angry. Steve

was the one *doing* this, he shouldn't get to cry. "I gotta go."

"Wait!" Billy grabbed at his jacket and Steve pushed him away as he got out of the car.

Billy hadn't even had a chance to say anything. You couldn't just dump somebody without the other person getting a say could you? Well, Billy supposed, you could. It seemed like an insane injustice at the moment.

"I can't, I can't," Steve said, his voice cracking and Billy heard a choked sob and then Steve was getting back into his Beemer and it was pulling out and he was driving away.

Billy sat in his car for an hour before he could bring himself to get home and then inwardly kicked himself for not following Steve. He drove to Steve's house but the Beemer wasn't there. He drove around town intermittently blank of emotion and then yelling and pounding his steering wheel and could not find Steve. At home he tried calling and either Steve still wasn't home or he wasn't picking up.

"What's your problem?" His father said because Billy was in no state to hide how upset he was.

"Nothing, sir."

Billy tried calling the next day and no Harrington. The Harringtons had gone out of town like Steve said. Billy cruised by their house where the Beemer was back in the driveway but Mr. Harrington's car was gone. He sat in his Camaro, parked in front of the Harringtons for a long time and his heart ached and he felt sick.

The day after that, Max found him crying in his room.

"What happened?" She was wearing that face that meant she was concerned but wary.

"Go away, Max," Billy whispered.

Max glanced behind her and closed his door, stepping into the room. "You and Steve?"

Billy's eyes flashed. "How did you-"

"Billy," Max said.

Of course she knew.

"Did you do something?" Max said.

"I didn't do shit," Billy spat. "Or...maybe I did. I dunno. He dumped my ass alright? Go ahead and laugh about it."

"I wouldn't," Max said. "But...I thought you really liked each other. You seemed like...you made each other better?"

"I told him I love him," Billy bit out. "And the asshole doesn't *believe* me." He sniffed and shook his head.

"That's stupid," Max said.

Billy threw up his hands.

"Well, you should make him believe you," Max said. "It would be really stupid if you both loved each other and you weren't together because he just doesn't believe you. That's so dumb!"

That made Billy laugh a little because, well, it *was* dumb. He wiped his eyes.

"Maybe you have to like...show him you love him," Max said. "I dunno."

"That's what I've been *doing*," Billy said. He had not quite been aware of it at the time but now that he looked back, it was what he had been doing all along; counting his breaths when he wanted to punch somebody sometimes, biting his tongue when he wanted to say something too mean that Steve wouldn't like and then because he actually wanted to be kind of a good person because Steve was such a good person and seemed *stronger* than Billy in a weird way, telling his secrets in whispers as Steve held him in his arms, holding Steve in his own when there was a nightmare. It was obvious. He had been telling Steve he loved him for months. The weird part was, for love of Steve, he actually wanted to do those things. Sometimes when he was

feeling especially soft about Steve he thought he might someday get to stop pretending he was the kind of man Harrington deserved because he would have actually become that.

“Maybe he doesn’t know what it looks like?” Max said, shrugging.

“What?” Billy said, sneering a little.

“Like...” Max tilted her head and said, “If you didn’t know what a gorilla looked like but you’d heard of one and you saw a gorilla you might still say, what’s that? I wanted to see a gorilla.”

Billy stared at her and said, “Did you just think of that?”

“*Donahue.*”

“Right.”

“I guess you have to tell him what he’s looking at,” Max said. “Maybe then he’ll believe it.”

With that bit of wisdom, Max left and Billy thought about what she’d said. He couldn’t stop thinking about it. It gave him an idea and on impulse he got up and grabbed his keys. He kept thinking about how Steve wanted so badly to be loved but didn’t know what it looked like as he drove to the Harringtons, found the key Steve always left for him (and had thankfully not hidden somewhere else after dumping him unceremoniously), and let himself in.

The Harrington house felt different with no one else there; too empty and too clean and sterile and hollow. Billy smoked and slowly made his way in the direction of Steve’s room, but he stopped to regard family photos; Steve and his parents looking the perfect family in nice clothes, posed just so.

Billy had told Steve all about his father once in whispers as they’d held each other. Then Steve had told him about his parents.

I don’t even think they like me, Steve had said. *How could they love me if they don’t like me?*

If you loved me just a little bit, Steve had said. *Just...enough.*

Something about that was bothering Billy.

Billy thought about that and about Steve and Nancy Wheeler and before he knew it he was sitting on Steve's neatly made bed in his tidy and plaid-walled room. Billy had thought, the first time he had seen Steve's room, that it was cold. Not temperature-wise but that it was cold like Steve's parents were cold. It must have seemed *very* cold because that was not the kind of thought Billy would usually have. Then they had made love and fallen asleep in each other's arms and after that Steve's room never felt anything but warm by virtue of being Steve's room. Because Steve was so *warm* even if his parents were like ice. Billy had never known that warmth could be something that mattered until he'd been surrounded by it.

He stood and paced and smoked some more and then he stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray that Steve kept around mostly for him and sat at Steve's desk and opened the trig notebook there to a blank page and grabbed a pen and started writing.

Billy wrote and wrote and scribbled and crossed things out, sometimes cursing under his breath and other times shouting in the silence of the room. He found himself frozen sometimes, thinking there was no way he could say these things to another person. He rifled through Steve's drawers looking for hidden booze to make it easier but couldn't find any. He wrote down all the things he'd done for love of Steve and then wrote a letter on top of that and his hand hurt and he felt sappy and helpless and so so so in love and he ached...

When he was done he did not feel much better.

What if Steve couldn't believe him?

His shirt, even unbuttoned, felt stifling, and he took it off and put on one of Steve's t-shirts from his hamper that still smelled like him and plopped down on the bed. He didn't mean to fall asleep, not being a routinely easy sleeper, except that Steve's bed always made him feel so comfy and safe on some subconscious level...

Steve-

You wanted me to say 'I love you' out loud in just the right way. Like somebody on TV. Because I guess that's supposed to make it true. I say it just right and that means I love you just a little bit, just enough, just barely enough because that's all you're asking for. I fucked up because I didn't say it like somebody on TV. I said it wrong like I'm fucked up because I'm fucked up. And you know that.

Because I don't love you just a little bit or just enough. I love you way too much, a whole lot more than you think you need and more than you might even want, enough to light up fucking Indiana. I try to show you and sometimes I try not to because it's so much and so fucking big and loud inside me, I thought everybody would see it and maybe everybody does except you.

I wrote a whole damn list of things under this letter that I've done just because I fucking love you. Consider that my fucking proof. You didn't know what it looked like, well here it is.

So if you're going to dump my ass, you better do it because you don't love me, but don't fucking tell me I don't love you because it's a LIE. I don't love you just enough like that tiny little bit you're asking for and I'll probably never say it like people on TV but I wake up happy just thinking of when I'm going to see you next and I fucking die a little when I have to leave you and every stupid fucking thing I see reminds me of you for some reason and even more crazy, you make me want to be the guy who deserves to even love you like that much less be loved back so fuck you, Steve Harrington, don't tell me you don't believe me. I've got fucking proof. But if it will change your mind, I'll say it a hundred times a day a hundred different ways.

I love you.

-B

"Billy," Steve said quietly.

Billy knew upon waking that he was in Steve's bed and he reached

out to hold him reflexively, only remembering his circumstances as he opened his eyes and then he sat up with a jerk.

Steve was sitting on the bed, holding the trig notebook, his hair flopping over his eyes that brimmed, his cheeks already streaked with tears.

“Billy,” Steve said. “I read this...I...I can’t believe...somebody...”

“I love you,” Billy said, his voice coming out shaky and raw. “You have to believe me. Please. Steve, please, just believe me, you have to, *please*-”

“Yeah,” Steve breathed, and kissed him and his lips were swollen and tasted like tears. “I’m sorry. Baby, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know what it looked like, you’re right, I can’t believe I almost let this go-”

“*Please* don’t let me fucking go-” Billy whispered into Steve’s shoulder, squeezing him tight.

“I *won’t*,” Steve said, and kissed him again and held the back of his head like he was something important. “Jesus, that letter. I can’t believe you really...”

“I love you,” Billy said, and he found now that once you said it, it started to feel more natural each time, and the way it was making Steve’s cheeks turn pink now, Steve so solid and warm in his arms, he said again, “I *love* you, fuck, Harrington. I *love* you-”

“I *know*,” Steve said, laughing a little.

“No, fuck you. You’re hearing it forever now. I love you! I love you so fucking much-”

“Billy,” Steve said, big brown eyes wide and serious as he ran his fingers through Billy’s hair. “Billy. I love you too. You have to believe me too. Okay?”

“Okay,,” Billy said, and kissed his cheek, smiling against it. “I believe you.”

“Enough to light up fucking Indiana,” Steve whispered in his ear.